



## TEACHERS' PRACTICES AND ISSUES ON BLENDED LEARNING DURING THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC

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**ABSTRACT.** This phenomenological research explored the lived experiences of teachers in the implementation of blended learning in the Gubat South District Teachers developed learning activity sheets suited to the grade level of the learners. Some teachers conducted home visits to personally give the materials to the learners. Most teachers used the modular approach because it was more practical, particularly for learners who do not have gadgets or have no access to the internet. Teachers whose learners had access to gadgets and the internet conducted online classes. Although teachers were able to quickly adapt to the blended learning modality, the lack of facilities, equipment, and materials made it very difficult to implement the learning plans in the new normal. First, the modular approach is not very effective for very young learners. Fourth, the ICT literacy level of teachers highly affects their effectiveness as learning facilitators. Practices of teachers in the blended learning modality involve using activity sheets and modules to facilitate the learning instructions and using technology in developing supplemental learning materials as well as in monitoring learners' academic progress. Introduction

**KEYWORDS:** *TEACHERS' PRACTICES AND ISSUES, BLENDED LEARNING*

### INTRODUCTION

The multitude of tasks that teachers perform aside from actual teaching affects their effectiveness as learning facilitators. The challenges faced by teachers were made worse by the pandemic which threatened global stability. The impact of the Covid 19 pandemic has overwhelmed education systems across the globe. Some of them were already stressed in many respects even before the pandemic restrictions and the shift in education delivery.

The threat of the virus affected the entire world, and its impact is greatly seen through its effect on the global economy causing fear and civil unrest. Among others, the education sector has been affected as nations experience the challenge of delivering education despite imposed lockdowns. With the improving conditions worldwide, the global economy has opened and the education sector has resumed the delivery of education to elementary, secondary, college, and even postgraduate students. This resumption was not without pressing challenges that were

more serious in countries that have never considered distance learning as a crucial education delivery mode. Nevertheless, education, as a major indicator of a nation's potential for growth and stability, must be given due attention even during the pandemic particularly considering that detrimental effects have been observed as evidenced by the learning gaps demonstrated by learners.

However, as equally important as learners' opportunity for learning is the teachers' well-being as facilitators of learning. With the shift in education delivery, many teachers are caught off guard and unprepared for the new responsibilities and tasks, as well as the stress that comes with them. While the pandemic has amplified and aggravated stress, mental health issues have been on the rise among teachers for decades. COVID-19 has caused an unprecedented crisis and brought new awareness to issues concerning teachers' mental health and psychosocial well-being, imposing the need for changes to counter the detrimental damage to teachers' wellness.

To be able to effectively perform their duties as front liners in the delivery of education, teachers must be well taken care of. Teaching is one of the most challenging professions because the responsibilities that teachers have extended far beyond actual teaching and the four walls of the classroom. This was even before the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted education delivery forcing the system to adapt new learning modalities to ensure the continuity of learning delivery while protecting teachers and learners from the risk of contracting the dreaded virus. The abrupt shift from traditional classroom teaching to the use of modular and online learning modalities has caught many teachers off guard.

Despite the threat of the pandemic still existing, and new variants of the virus being detected, teachers press on with their role as front liners in education delivery. To ensure the safety of teachers and learners alike, the use of distance learning is highly encouraged and face-to-face sessions are discouraged if not banned.

The emergence of the pandemic as a global health emergency has pushed the government through the Inter-Agency Task Force to set restriction policies, particularly for children and adolescents, and suspend face-to-face learning in all public and private schools. Amidst this crisis, the Department of Education's battle cry of «education must continue» faced challenges in continuing quality and holistic education among its learners. Quinones explained that distance learning refers to a learning delivery modality where learning takes place between teachers and learners who are geographically remote from each other during instruction. Most public schools in the Philippines preferred Modular Distance Learning.

The traditional classroom setting has always been taxing on teachers who, aside from making necessary preparations for daily lessons, also have to work on other responsibilities beyond the actual teaching-learning sessions. The unprecedented crisis in education brought about by the pandemic has elevated this taxing job to a new level of challenges, particularly for teachers who do not have sufficient training for distance and blended learning. Regardless, education systems were forced to adopt new and alternative learning delivery modalities to ensure that education delivery continues while keeping teachers and learners safe from the risk of contracting the dreaded virus. The

video lessons are then uploaded to be accessed by learners.

The Department of Education and the Commission on Higher Education indeed introduced alternative learning delivery modalities in response to the need to deliver education despite imposed Covid 19 restrictions. Article XIV Sections 1 and 2 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution underscored the duty of the state to make education accessible to all.

DepEd Secretary Briones first announced that the opening of schools would be on August 24, 2020. The decision of DepEd to resume education delivery and open schools in 2020 with the existing threat of Covid 19 was met with criticisms. Parents protested that online classes are not feasible for most learners considering that not all families can afford computers and stable internet connections. To this, DepEd replied that lack of access to technology would not be a problem as schools will be providing printed modules.

In the Bicol Region, the Department of Education, Region V initiated the development of contextualized Self-Learning Modules which aim to provide learners with basic material for continuity of learning. Magsambol previously published an article that looked into the readiness of the Department of Education and the anxieties of teachers in the opening of classes. In his article, he presented the responses of the teachers and parents he interviewed. It has been two years since the pandemic first affected education delivery in the country.

From purely distance delivery, the DepEd has moved on with the implementation of blended learning through the approval of limited face-to-face classes. Most teachers

previously resorted to a purely modular approach while others who found it feasible opted for online and offline strategies in support of modular instructions while schools were closed. Now, from pilot implementation to expanded implementation of the limited face-to-face classes, teachers are facilitating education delivery through a truly blended learning approach. The researcher, as a school head, finds it necessary to understand the experiences of teachers as front liners in education delivery.

This will give her a deeper understanding of what teachers go through as they ensure that learners continue to receive an education despite this trying time.

This phenomenological research explored the lived experiences of teachers in the implementation of blended learning in the Gubat South District. Specifically, sought answers to the following queries:

1. What are the different practices of teachers in the implementation of blended learning?
2. How is blended learning implemented as experienced by teachers, school heads, and parents?
3. What is the extent of readiness of teachers, school heads, and parents in the implementation of blended learning?
4. What education concepts were learned based on the implementation of blended learning?

### Findings

Through the interviews conducted, the researcher was able to formulate the following findings to answer the specific problems of this qualitative research:

### Practices of Teachers in the Implementation of Blended Learning

Teachers developed learning activity sheets suited to the grade level of the learners. They set schedules for parents to get the materials and return them after the learners have answered them. Some teachers conducted home visits to personally give the materials to the learners. Home visits were also facilitative in monitoring learners' academic progress. They also help in establishing a partnership between teachers and parents.

### How Blended Learning is Implemented

Blended learning was implemented by employing the distance modalities and limited in-person interaction allowed by DepEd. Most teachers used the modular approach because it was more practical, particularly for learners who do not have gadgets or have no access to the internet. Teachers whose learners had access to gadgets and the internet conducted online classes. School heads supervised the delivery of learning instructions. Parents facilitated learning at home.

### The extent of Readiness in the Implementation of Blended Learning

The schools were generally unprepared for the abrupt change in education delivery. The teachers and school heads lacked training in alternative learning delivery modalities before implementation. Although teachers were able to quickly adapt to the blended learning modality, the lack of facilities, equipment, and materials made it very difficult to implement the learning plans in the new normal. The parents also found the modalities complicated at first. Despite the flexibility of the alternative learning delivery

modality, DepEd was not able to satisfactorily provide the supplies and learning materials necessary for the blended setup.

### Education Concepts Learned based on the Implementation of Blended Learning

Based on the narratives of the teacher participants on their experiences in the implementation of blended learning, several education concepts were established. First, the modular approach is not very effective for very young learners. Second, signal mapping is critical before the implementation of online distance learning. DepEd should first identify the areas with strong internet connectivity to also identify where online teaching strategies may be suggested or imposed. Third, home visits remain an effective intervention. Fourth, the ICT literacy level of teachers highly affects their effectiveness as learning facilitators. Lastly, and to generalize, there is a need to establish sound contingency plans in anticipation of education crises that might again affect education delivery.

### Conclusions

Based on the findings presented, the researcher formulated the following conclusions:

1. The practices of teachers in the blended learning modality involve using activity sheets and modules to facilitate the learning instructions, and using technology in developing supplemental learning materials as well as in monitoring learners' academic progress.
2. Blended learning is implemented by employing a modular approach, online lessons, and home visitations, with the first

strategy being the most feasible during the height of the pandemic.

3. Teachers, school heads, and parents are generally unprepared for blended learning due to the lack of training before its implementation and the lack of facilities, equipment, and materials necessary to effectively carry out the alternative learning delivery modality.

4. Several education concepts are underscored particularly the perceived ineffectiveness of the modular and online modalities, the continuing need for ICT training for teachers, and the need to have a sound contingency plan for education emergencies.

#### Recommendations

Based on the formulated conclusions, the researcher made the following recommendations:

1. Supervisors be attentive to the needs to teachers to be able to give technical assistance and improve their teaching practices
2. Schools Division Offices be able to design and operationalize a scheme for the implementation of alternative learning delivery modalities to identify where they are suitable
3. DepEd be able to satisfactorily provide the necessary training, facilities, equipment, and materials to ensure the schools' capacity to effectively continue education delivery even in times of crises
4. DepEd be able to design contingency plans designed to ensure continuity in education delivery despite crises, based on

the experience challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic.

#### Suggestions for Future Research

With the findings established through this phenomenological study, the researcher makes the following suggestions for future researchers as the focus of investigation:

- Development of learning materials that will help in bridging the learning gaps
- Investigation on the effectiveness of reading intervention in addressing poor reading development
- Case study on the impact of the pandemic on learners in remote areas